



The Constantia Float was presented by Suffolk's Contractors and Building Suppliers

The 1958 Suffolk-Nansemond Festival

by Kermit Hobbs, Historian

We all know that Suffolk's recorded history dates back to 1608, when Captain John Smith sailed up the Nansemond River and "traded" with the Nansemond Indians. But three hundred fifty years later, in 1958, citizens of Suffolk and Nansemond County spent more than a week remembering and celebrating all that had happened in the intervening years.

The Suffolk-Nansemond Festival ran from May 9 through May 16, 1958, and was a result of many months of planning by hundreds of people. Former Mayor R. L. Woodward headed up a complex organization that managed every aspect of the celebration. Responsibilities were delegated through "Divisions" for Revenue, Participation, Tickets, Publicity, Hospitality, and Special Events. Each Division comprised committees, local civic organizations and even schools and churches. It was truly a community effort.

The Festival opened with the Queen's Coronation Ball on Saturday evening, May 9. This event was held at the Virginia Department of Highways' garage, a venue deemed large enough for the number of people in attendance. Here, Miss Roslyn Aston was crowned Queen of the Festival. Along with her were eight other young ladies named as members of her Court. Their selection was based on the number of votes received by each of them over the three previous weeks.

(cont'd pg. 4 & 5)



Letter from the President

We are genuinely grateful for your continued support. Your generous contributions allow us to provide speaker programs, conduct summer history camps, present historic exhibitions, assist researchers and archivists, and maintain our lovely headquarters at the Phillips-Dawson House. You are the reason we are able to continue these programs for our community. Thank You!

We look forward to a time when we can once again enjoy the group activities of the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society. We can't wait to see you again!! Until then, stay healthy, and safe.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Moore, President

Greetings from the Director

Welcome back friends!

I extend my condolences to all who have lost loved ones during this unprecedented time in our history.

In March of 2020, after a wonderful event at the Phillips-Dawson House, we had to close our doors to the public. As the year progressed, every fundraiser we had scheduled was cancelled. Our faithful volunteers could no longer be on the premises. Afternoon Conversations, which took place monthly, were brought to a screeching halt.

With that being said, all of this has had a tremendous effect on our operating budget. Your membership and support this year means more than ever before for the continuation of our mission here at the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society.

To help defer costs and to make NEWSLETTERS more accessible, we are moving to a PDF format going forward. We hope that you enjoy having our NEWSLETTERS delivered to your email.

We miss seeing all of you and look forward to returning to normal hours in the near future.

Best regards,
 Kimberly



ANNUAL SALE



WHEN: June 12, 2021

TIME: 9:00am - 2:00pm

WHERE: Phillips Dawson House

We have had so many great donations and are excited to bring this event back to the community. Thank you to all who have generously donated items for the sale.

There is still time to drop of your items for the upcoming sale. We will accept donations until June 1st. All proceeds from this sale go directly to the operating budget.

Please call to set up an appointment for easy drop off. 757-539-2781

AFTERNOON CONVERSATIONS

We are hopeful that Afternoon Conversations will return to the Phillips-Dawson House in the summer. We are working with Suffolk Public Library to schedule speakers for the rest of the year. When we have the information, you will receive an email with the special speaker for that month.

RESTORATION DONATION

The Phillips-Dawson House is in much need of repairs on the exterior of the building.

This year SNHS received a grant from the Suffolk Foundation in the amount of \$1,500 for a portion of the repairs. However, we hope that you will be able to contribute a donation to help us make this project possible. Our goal to complete the projects necessary is approximately \$10,000.

You can call 757.539.2781 with a credit card donation or send a check to:

PO Box 1255, Suffolk, VA 23439

SNHS is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization



History balances the frustration of "how far we have to go" with the satisfaction of "how far we have come." It teaches us tolerance for the human shortcomings and imperfections which are not uniquely of our generation, but of all time." Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

The 1958 Suffolk-Nansemond Festival (cont'd)

Each of the seven days of the festival featured a theme that was played out through daytime and evening events. The themes included Religious Heritage Day, Governor's Day, Youth Education Day, Ruritan Agriculture Day, Brothers of the Brush and Jubilee Belles Day, Veterans Day, and Homecoming Day.

A "mile-long" parade was presented on Monday, "Governor's Day," and featured ten marching bands and twenty floats. The first float featured the Festival Queen and her Court and was followed by others depicting events in Suffolk's history. These included Captain John Smith's voyage up the Nansemond River; the charter of Suffolk in 1742; George Washington surveying the Dismal Swamp; the Siege of Suffolk; and other events. The Kings Fork Ruritan Club presented two connected floats, the first featuring young people dancing the Virginia Reel, representing 1608, and on the second, teenagers jitterbugging to the Rock & Roll music of 1958.

Each evening from Monday through Saturday, a pageant entitled "The Constant Cavalcade" was presented at Peanut Park. The name "Constant" reflected the endurance shown by Suffolk and Nansemond Counties citizens over the years, and it also recalled the name of John Constant, whose tobacco warehouse on the Nansemond River marked the site where the town of Suffolk originated. John Constant's home, "Constantia", was depicted on one of the floats in Monday's parade.



The opening scene of The Constant Cavalcade featured the Festival Queen and her court.

Each evening's performance opened with a program related to the day's theme. This was followed by the grand entrance and introduction of Queen Roslyn and her royal court, and then by eighteen more "episodes" depicting various events in the history of Suffolk. The Suffolk News Herald reported that "There were a multitude colorful period costumes, horses, covered wagons, bathing beauties, can-can dancers, a Gay Nineties picnic frolic, and a reenactment of "The Great Fire," which "sent billows of smoke over the entire area." The cast of The Constant Cavalcade totaled more than four hundred people.

Men of Suffolk were called "Brothers of the Brush" and were encouraged to grow beards, wear top hats and derbies, and carry canes. Suffolk clothing stores sold the hats and special bow ties for the "Brothers." Likewise, Suffolk ladies became "Jubilee Belles," and many wore old-time bonnets. Wooden "nickels" with the Suffolk Nansemond Festival logo were sold as souvenirs. On Thursday, Men's beards and Belles' bonnets were judged by the Kangaroo Court on Main Street. Suffolk shop owners decorated their windows, and prizes were awarded to those judged to be best. Keystone Kops "patrolled" downtown Suffolk during the festivities.

A souvenir Suffolk Nansemond Festival booklet was published, containing 112 pages of ads, historical articles and photographs, and information about the Festival. These booklets were sold by Suffolk and Nansemond County school children.



Jubilee Belles Frances Hobbs and daughter, Cindy

Special thanks go to LaSandra Adams, who researched Suffolk News Herald microfilms at Morgan Memorial Library for this article.